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RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PDP WINS FCT BY-ELECTIONS

REF: ABUJA 686

1.(SBU) Summary: Fresh elections were held April 5 and 6 in the Nigerian Federal Capital Territory (FCT) for the region's sole Senate seat and one of its two House of Representatives constituencies. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced that both races were won by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), a reversal of the 2007 general election in which the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) took both seats. Allegations of ballot theft on the eve of the election caused INEC to delay polling in Abuja town to from April 5 to April 6. The delay may have contributed to the low turnout, which even according to INEC's own figures was less than 11%. The FCT by-election, similar to that in Kogi one week earlier (reftel), was "business as usual" for INEC and the parties, demonstrating that high-level talk of reform has not yet had much impact on the conduct of elections in Nigeria. End Summary.

12. (U) The election tribunal in Abuja annulled the elections of FCT Senator Jubril Usman Wowo (ANPP) and Representative Nasir Mohammed (ANPP, Abuja/Bwari Federal Constituency) on September 29, 2007. Both elections were overturned on grounds that candidates of other political parties had been unlawfully excluded from contesting the April 2007 general elections. The tribunal decisions were upheld on appeal and fresh polls were ordered for April 5.

13. (U) Election day got off to a bad start when an ANPP polling agent claimed to witness INEC officials secretly moving cartons of ballot papers out of an Abuja distribution center in the early hours of April 5. Several opposition parties raised the alarm, claiming that up to 28,000 ballot papers were missing. INEC officials denied the allegation, but they decided to postpone voting within the Abuja municipality by one day, to April 6, while they investigated. INEC later reported that they spent eight hours on April 5 checking supplies and that all the materials were intact. However, one INEC official said it was difficult to confirm whether ballots were missing since they were not serial numbered.

14. (U) The FCT is normally quiet on the weekend, but it was especially so on both April 5 and 6, and for a casual observer it was possible to notice that an election was even taking place. Political section locally engaged staff

observed polling places in Kubwa and Gwarimpa, both large working class communities on the outskirts of Abuja, on April 15. In both areas, election materials were distributed on time and voting commenced peacefully at 9:00 am. However, there seemed to be little public interest in voting. Polling stations were generally quiet and observed turnout was less than 5%. Some of the voters complained to embassy staff that voting was a waste of time, noting that "INEC staff and the government would declare candidates of their choice (as winners) at the end of the day." By 4:00 pm, all observed stations had closed and finished counting their results.

15. (U) After the conclusion of voting in Abuja town on April 6, INEC declared Adamu Sidi Ali (PDP) the winner in the FCT Senate race with 46,736 votes, defeating Solomon Wowo (ANPP) with 28,118 votes. In the House of Representatives race, INEC announced that the PDP candidate Phillip Aduda won with 19,734 votes to ANPP candidate Nasiru Mohammed's 6,653 votes. Voter turnout was low (11% for the Senate race, 6% for the House seat) even according to INEC's reported figures. Opposition parties, including the ANPP which lost both seats, complain that the election was marred by ballot box stuffing and voter intimidation by the ruling party.

16. (SBU) Comment: Voter interest in the FCT by-election was low to begin with, but the one-day delay of polling within Abuja town probably also contributed to the low turnout. It is disappointing that even in a low-turnout election in Nigeria's relatively orderly capital, INEC was still accused of giving ballots to the ruling party and was forced to delay voting in Abuja until Sunday. Allegations of ballot theft, which are nearly impossible to verify due to lack of serial numbers, are especially troubling given the complete reversal of the general election results shifting both the Senate and House seats from the opposition ANPP to the ruling PDP. It seems that the FCT by-election, similar to that in Kogi one week earlier (reftel), was "business as usual" for INEC, demonstrating that high-level talk of reform has not yet had much impact on the conduct of elections in Nigeria. End Comment.
SANDERS